

LILLA BIKFALVY RUSSELL-SMITH

Vimalakīrti in medieval Chinese and Uygur art

LINKS BETWEEN REGIONAL CENTRES ON THE SILK ROAD



The duality of early types of Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra illustrations

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE *VIMALAKĪRTINIRDEŚA SŪTRA* appeared as early as the fourth century C. E. in Chinese painting, and a few decades later, in the first quarter of the fifth century on steles.¹ From this time to the end of the Tang dynasty the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* was illustrated in many parts of China, and the figure of Vimalakīrti became one of the most popular motifs in the iconography of Chinese Buddhist art.

The *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* describes the debate between Vimalakīrti – a layman in his sickbed who is really an enlightened bodhisattva – and the bodhisattva of Wisdom, Mañjuśrī. At the request of Śākyamuni Buddha, who is teaching nearby, only Mañjuśrī dares to take up the challenge to debate the nature of non-duality with Vimalakīrti. Multitudes of people and supernatural beings arrive to listen to the conversation. When Vimalakīrti is introduced in the sutra his secular lifestyle is contrasted with his true enlightened nature:

“He wore the white clothing of a layman, but observed the conduct of a monk. He lived in a house, but kept himself away from the world of desire, the world of form and the world of no-form. He said he had a son, a wife, an harem, but practised continence. He appeared surrounded by servants, but always sought solitude. He appeared adorned with ornaments, but he always possessed the primary and secondary marks.” (LAMOTTE 1976, 29).

The Chinese literati identified themselves with Vimalakīrti, picturing him as a scholar-sage. Although none of these representations survived, they determined the iconographic type of later long-lasting images [Figure 1]. At the

¹ The *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* was written in Sanskrit, around the second century C. E. The title comes from the sutra's main figure: Vimalakīrti. Most of the original Sanskrit version is now lost, and the sutra is known through its translations into Chinese, Tibetan, Sogdian and Khotanese. For more about the original text and the translations of the sutra, and about its importance see LAMOTTE 1976, XXV–CXI. For a short discussion of the translations into Chinese, Sogdian and Uygur see ZIEME 2000, 7–22.

same time in the north of China, Vimalakīrti was represented as a bodhisattva with a halo as for example at the Binglingsi Caves 炳靈寺石窟 in Gansu 甘肅 province near Lanzhou 蘭州 in the fifth century [Figure 2]. The understanding of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra*, the function of the illustrations, and the available artistic sources were very different in the north and south of China. The duality in the iconography of Vimalakīrti reflected the differing artistic tastes and religious approaches in early medieval China. In later centuries, however, with the growing contacts between north and south, and eventually the unification of China under the Sui 隋 dynasty (581–618) the northern type changed under the influence from the south, and eventually disappeared.

The first portrait of Vimalakīrti was made in the south, in the fourth century according to Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠, who prized individuality above all else and emphasised the act of creation in this legendary description:

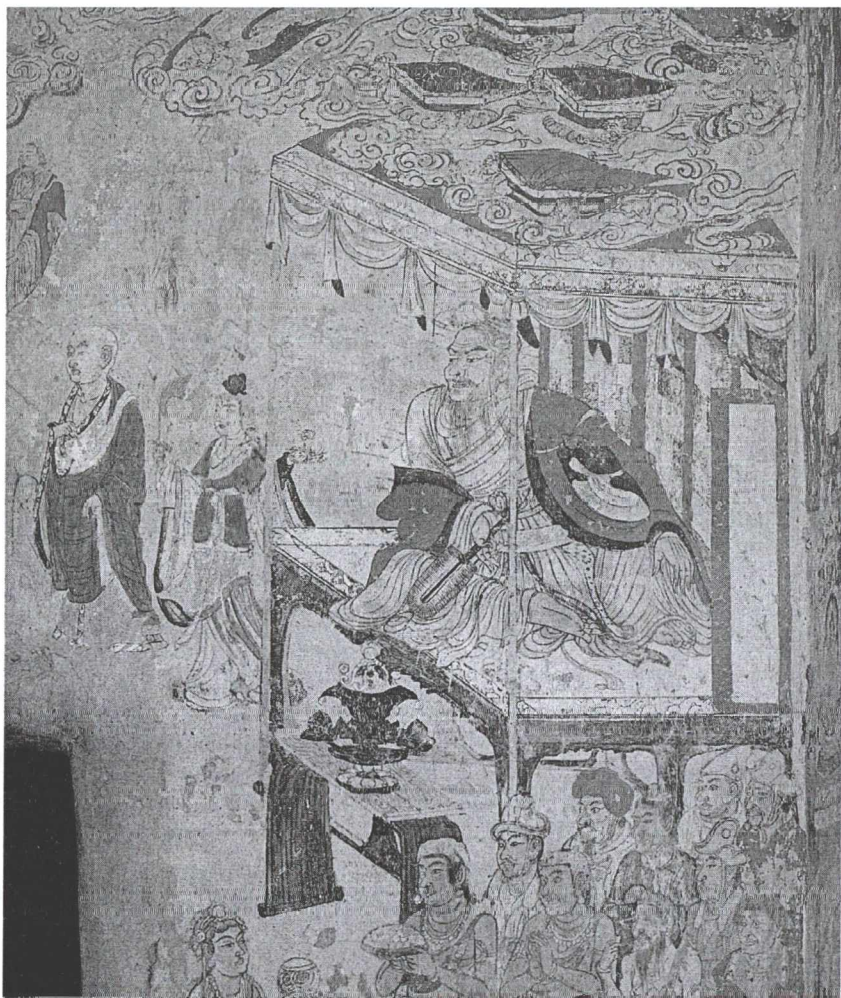


FIGURE 1.

"When Waguansi was first founded the monks of the temple instituted a [Buddha] Assembly and invited the great ones of the court to make the spire [of the pagoda] ring and put themselves down for generous contributions. None of the gentlemen and grandees went beyond 100,000 cash, but when it came to Chang Kang's [Gu Kaizhi's] turn, he just struck the spire, and put his name down for a million. Chang Kang had always been poor, and the monks considered this to be mere boast. But later, when monks from the temple came to collect the contributions, Chang Kang said: 'The thing to do is to prepare a wall'. Accordingly, while the door was closed, he came and went for a month and some days, and what he painted was a figure of Vimalakīrti. When the work was finished, and he was just about to dot the pupils, he said to the monks: 'From those who come to see it on the first day ask a contribution of a 100,000. On the second day 50,000 will do, and on the third day you may rely on precedent in asking for contributions.' When the door was opened, a light shone throughout the whole temple, and it was so packed and jammed with contributors that in no time at all 1,000,000 cash was obtained."²

We would imagine that Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 most probably chose to depict Vimalakīrti in the style of portrait paintings. Zhang Yanyuan described the composition as follows:

"Master Ku first created the Portrait of Wei-mo-chieh, who is elegant and fragile, showing signs of illness; and steadying himself on the [arm-rest], in a mode of forgetting speech." (HO 1985, 155).

The creation of the iconographical type of Vimalakīrti shown as a Chinese scholar has a very unique position in Chinese art. It was introduced at a time when Buddhism had special importance for Chinese intellectuals. The substitution of Chinese concepts for foreign ones was a common device used by early translators and propagators of Buddhist texts. According to the *huahu* 化胡 theory Buddhism was just an offshoot of native philosophy. Vimalakīrti did not only resemble a Daoist Sage, but was also a perfect *junzi* 君子, who could cultivate his mind and follow all important Confucian virtues (CHEN 1964, 208).

Unfortunately none of these original images survive, but later representations were undoubtedly influenced by the southern type. According to the text Vimalakīrti pretended to be ill, and received Mañjuśrī lying in a bed. The scholar in a bed, reclining



FIGURE 2.

² From Zhang Yanyuan's *Lidai minghuaqi* (HO 1985, 473).

against a pillow or an armrest became a popular iconographic type that survived until at least the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).³ In fact, it was during the Six Dynasties (265–589) that this type was born. Specific compositional, figural poses were created “which ultimately became a standard for later artists in their depictions of sages and worthies of antiquity” (LAING 1974, 9).

Buddhism in the North played a very different role. It became a religion promoted by the rulers of the Northern Dynasties, with centralised and well-organised centres for worship around the capitals. Under state sponsorship Kumarajiva translated all the important Buddhist scriptures, among them the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* in the early fifth century C. E. Illustrations of the sutra appeared very soon after this, proving the sutra’s popularity (HE 1983, 62). Unlike in the south many of these representations have survived intact, as they were often carved in more durable materials, such as stone.

On many later illustrations based on the southern type Mañjuśrī and Vimalakīrti are facing each other engaged in debate [Figure 3]. In the early representations in the north, Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī are hardly more than symbols, but there too they are shown in house-like structures, facing each other, often on either side of a Buddha Assembly. Although Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī might look completely identical, Vimalakīrti is often distinguished by holding a fan.



FIGURE 3.

The *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* illustrations remained closely connected to the image of the Buddha for centuries to come. On steles they appear on the two sides of a niche, containing a Buddha Assembly, or even inside the niche. This northern type was followed for a long time in the Mogao 莫高 caves near Dunhuang 敦煌 [Figure 4], and it was only abandoned during the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–906), when the whole composition became more complex.⁴

³ For example “Scholar Taking his Ease”, Ming dynasty, 15th–16th century, Freer Gallery, Washington, Inc. No. 11.232 (LAWTON 1973, fig. 45).

⁴ Near Dunhuang, in Gansu 甘肅 province, western China are three series of Buddhist cave shrines: the Mogao caves are located some 25 kilometres to the south-east; the Western Thousand Buddha Caves 西千佛洞 about the same distance to the west; and the Yulin 榆林 caves about a hundred kilometres to the east. Over four hundred cave temples were decorated with wall paintings between the fourth and fourteenth centuries. In a small side chapel (Cave 17) tens of thousands of manuscripts and hundreds of paintings on paper and silk were found in 1900. Most of the paintings are today divided between collections in Paris, London and Delhi (WHITFIELD 1982, WHITFIELD 1983; GIÈS 1995).

Vimalakīrti representations in tenth-century Dunhuang

Dunhuang was located in Sha prefecture, Shazhou 沙州, where the northern and southern branches of the Silk Road met, and developed into a very significant cultural centre. Any change in the style of Dunhuang art was a sensitive indicator of the area's cultural and political links in different periods. It has been observed that during the Tang dynasty, especially in the seventh – eighth centuries the style of secular paintings from central China was followed with remarkable closeness in Dunhuang despite the huge distances. The representation of the Chinese emperor in front of Vimalakīrti's sickbed in Cave 220 is often quoted to illustrate this, because of its striking resemblance to the portraits of emperors on the famous scroll attributed to Yan Liben 閻立本 from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts [Figures 5–6].⁵

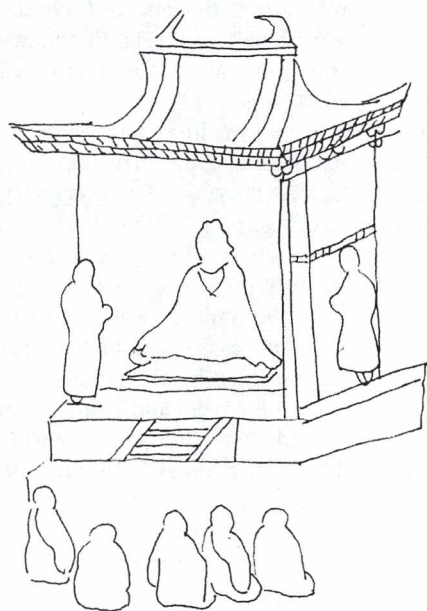


FIGURE 4.

In contrast, from the Middle Tang period, the time of Tibetan occupation (787–847), Shazhou developed closer links with the neighbouring territories than with central China. The changes in the style of tenth century Dunhuang painting, such as the repetition of subject matter and the embellishment of popular compositions, have already been explained as being due to the isolation of Shazhou from the imperial centre. Most recently the importance of organised workshops has been pointed out (FRASER 2004, 15–47). There was a shift from a China-centered, elite-based culture at Dunhuang to a multi-cultural society characterised by independence from central China. Patronage of commoners and of the ruling class alike reflect these changes.

The late ninth- and tenth-century illustrations of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* in Dunhuang, such as the one in Cave 138, were the results of over two hundred years of local development [Figure 7]. In these late examples, the most important teachings of almost every chapter of the *Sūtra* were neatly added to the composition. The late compositions are basically the enlargement of the core schema as may be seen in Cave 220 from the Early Tang period and in Cave 103 from the High Tang period, which consist of Vi-

⁵ For example see DUNHUANG 1987, figs. 22–23; FRASER 1996, 18–19. For a reproduction of Cave 220 see DUNHUANG 1987, 33. Yan Liben's "Thirteen Emperors" scroll, in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, is widely reproduced, e. g. in WU 1996, plate 1.



FIGURE 5.

female Ganzhou Uygur donors were also depicted [Figure 11].

Dunhuang's art in the tenth century has been considered to be overwhelmingly Chinese, but elsewhere I have demonstrated the increasing importance of the Uygurs in this period. (RUSSELL-SMITH 2005) Upon entering Cave 98, one of the largest caves of the Mogao caves, built in 923–925 C. E., the visitor is immediately struck by the contrast between the densely decorated upper section of the side walls and the soberly presented lower section where donor portraits are shown. In contrast with the multitude of small figures illustrating scenes from various sutras, the large, erect donor figures stand quietly as if making a silent offering. They are led by the governor of Dunhuang Cao Yijin 曹議金, who commissioned the caves, and behind him are represented his Uygur and Chinese wives and their attendants wearing non-Chinese outfits and water-drop-shaped Uygur headdresses [Figure 10, 11]. The significance of these figures cannot be doubted: their large size and elaborate clothing emphasise the important role they played. Cao Yijin who commissioned the cave was very consciously demonstrating the power links in the area most important to Dunhuang: his son-in-law, the King of Khotan, wears such an elaborate crown that his portrait cuts into the plane of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* illustration directly above him.

In all these illustrations the listeners to the debate were assembled behind and by the side of Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, and by the seventh century were divided into a Chinese crowd and a group of exotic foreigners. By the early tenth century there was a long tradition of showing foreign envoys in Dunhuang. Many types had been shown continuously for several hundred years. The crowd of foreigners on ninth century examples usually included a Ti-

malakīrti's sickbed on one side, Mañjuśrī and his assembly on the other side, and several key figures of the *Sūtra*.⁶ In Caves 220 and 103 Mañjuśrī and Vimalakīrti appear on the eastern wall, on either side of the cave entrance. In the seventh and eighth centuries, by contrast, the whole composition could be shown on the side wall, as in Cave 335.⁷ With the larger surface available in the later versions many new details were added. The tenth century examples were often once again shown on either side of the entrance wall, but, in line with the changing taste, the compositions became increasingly crowded, as is the case in Cave 98, dating from the first half of the tenth century [Figure 9]. In this cave an important row of

⁶ Dunhuang Cave 220 is dated to 642 by two inscriptions on the north and east walls respectively (NING 2004, 109–110). For illustrations see DUNHUANG 1987, plate 30 and plates 154–155.

⁷ Dunhuang Cave 335, north wall, Early Tang period (DUNHUANG 1987, plate 61).

betan monarch, a Korean and a Turkic figure. The Turks could be recognised by their typical triangular collars, which resembled Sogdian dress.⁸

Among the familiar types of headgear a new type appeared that resembles the three-pronged headdress of the Uygurs from the Turfan area. The figure wearing this appears in front of Vimalakīrti's sickbed for the first time in Dunhuang Cave 138, constructed between 894–906 (LI 1998, 63) [Figure 8]. He can be clearly seen in the bottom part of the painting on the left, in the third row, and his head appears just in front of Vimalakīrti's sickbed. The shape of his headgear looks like the "three-pronged headdress", labelled *Dreizackkappe* by von Gabain (GABAIN 1965, 331–335) [Figure 12]. A figure wearing the same type of headgear can also be seen in a similar position in Cave 98 [Figure 9]. However, the headgear depicted in Dunhuang is white in colour, and not black as usually seen in paintings found in the Turfan area. Therefore it is possible that this indicates a regional variation, and that these envoys may represent another area such as Ganzhou, although this assumption needs to remain speculative at this point.⁹

Vimalakīrti on an Uygur wall painting

It is usually assumed that the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* was not illustrated outside China, even though the *Sūtra* itself enjoyed great popularity in Central Asia. A composition in Cave 3 in Murtuq which is very similar to the Late Tang examples from Dunhuang, has until recently gone unnoticed by scholars writing about representations of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* [Figure 13] (GRÜNWEDEL 1912, 303–307).¹⁰ Murtuq is in the vicinity of the Bezeklik caves near Turfan: in an area dominated by Uygurs by the tenth century. The Uygurs migrated south after the fall of their Kaghanate in the 840s, and the two most important groups eventually settled



FIGURE 6.

⁸ For Turkic stone figures found in Mongolia see KHUDYAKOV 1985, 171, fig. 4. Further examples can be found in KUNKOVÁCS 2002.

⁹ This was pointed out by Jorinde Ebert, June 2001, in a personal communication. As at present we know of no representations or descriptions of the male headdress worn by the Ganzhou Uygur ruling class, my suggestion remains a hypothesis, but the resemblance of this headgear to the Uygur *Dreizackkappe* and the fact that it appeared in the early tenth century in Dunhuang are worth nothing.

¹⁰ The site is also described in LE COQ 1913, 13–14, plates 74a, 38. For reproductions and a short description see ZHONGGUO 1995, 64–66 and plates 165–173. In this relatively recent publication the subject matter was correctly identified. Jorinde Ebert compared this wall painting recently to a paper fragment see EBERT 2000, 197–202.

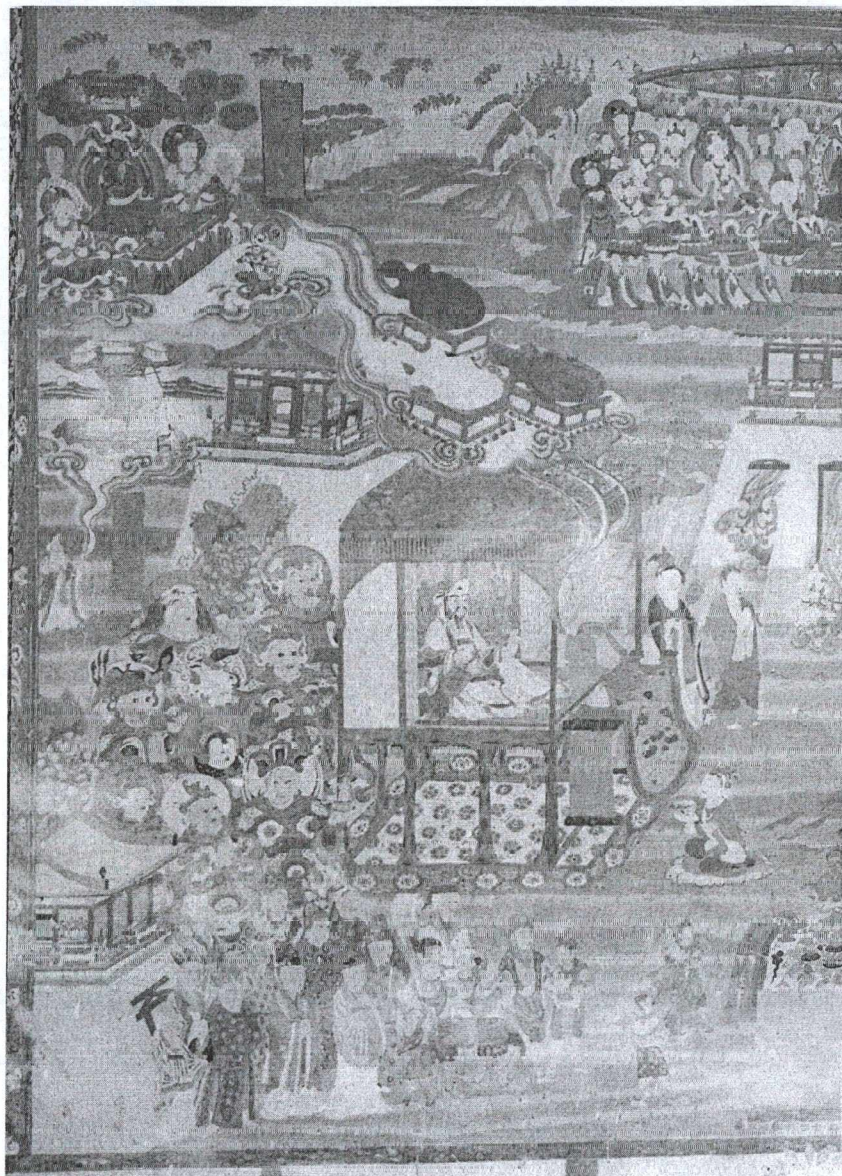


FIGURE 7.

east and west of Dunhuang, with Qocho (Gaochang 高昌 in Chinese, near today's Turfan) and Ganzhou 甘州 with their respective centres. Silk Road trade was therefore dominated by Uyghurs in this area: they could cut off the roads in the narrow Hexi corridor at times of conflict with Dunhuang (RUSSELL-SMITH 2001, 67–68). By the third decade of the tenth century, despite short spurs of conflict, the Chinese rulers of Dunhuang became allies of the Uyghurs, and intermarried with the family of the Ganzhou Uyghur *kaghan*. The increasing influence of Uyghur patrons in Dunhuang in the tenth–eleventh



FIGURE 7a.

centuries was the subject of a detailed study by this author (RUSSELL-SMITH 2001, RUSSELL-SMITH 2003, RUSSELL-SMITH 2005).

There are five caves at Murtuq (also known as Baixiha 拜錫哈), and Cave 3 is the largest of these, the only one with a central pillar. The shape of the cave is common in the area, with space around the central pillar for circum-bulation, and an arched ceiling. It is clear from Grünwedel's description that the whole cave was decorated according to a Buddhist programme. The Murtuq *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* illustration is unfortunately, in very bad

condition today. Almost half of the composition has fallen off, including most of Vimalakīrti's figure, and the remaining figures are all defaced. Importantly there is an inscription in the lower part of the composition, which Grünwedel thought illegible, but recognised as being written in the Uygur script (GRÜNWEDEL 1912, 305).

As there are Uygur inscriptions in the lower part of the Murtuq mural, and under each framed illustration on the right side of the composition, we can be certain that this mural was painted after the Uygurs moved to the area in the mid-ninth century. The rendering of the mountains is also remarkable: on a shared baseline they are shown as triangles with a smooth outline overlapping each other, defined by parallel contours. This remains a feature of Uygur art up to the latest period.¹¹



FIGURE 8.

Dunhuang examples. The arrangement is especially reminiscent of Dunhuang Cave 138, so the study of this and other Dunhuang wall paintings can help identify the lost or barely discernible scenes of the Murtuq painting. The figures of Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī were shown on the two sides with the multitudes assembled around them. Mañjuśrī is still clearly recognisable on the right, while the remains of Vimalakīrti's sickbed can just be made out on the left. He was wearing the white clothing of a layman. The layout commonly used in Dunhuang is also followed in the case of the figures shown in the centre: a bodhisattva pouring rice represents an illusory bodhisattva created by Vimalakīrti, who brought a bowl of rice from a distant Buddha land, called All Fragrances. This bowl of rice could feed all the multitudes, and its

¹¹ Such "crystalline mountains" appear on the wall painting fragment known as "Dragon in a Lake" from Bezeklik, MIK III 8383, reproduced in YALDIZ 2000, cat. no. 317.

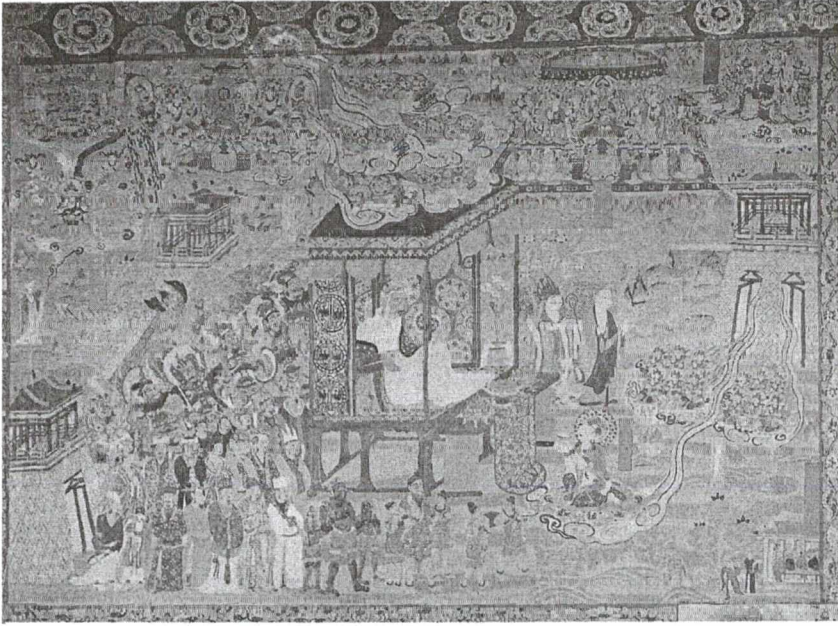


FIGURE 9.

fragrance lasted for days. The bodhisattva pouring the rice can be seen towards the middle of the composition.

Despite the poor state of preservation, the remains of Śāriputra and the goddess are also recognisable in the middle of the composition in Murtuq. This refers to an incident in the *Sūtra*, when a goddess appeared showering flowers on the assembly. When the flowers reached the bodhisattvas, they fell to the ground, as expected, but in the case of the disciples they stuck to their bodies. Śāriputra tried to shake the flowers off in vain: “Flowers cling to those who have not yet dispelled the pervasions of the passions; they do not cling to those who have dispelled them” (LAMOTTE 1976, 161) explained the goddess, and Śāriputra had to realise that fearing birth and death meant that form, sound, smell, taste and touch could still trouble him. Had he been fearless, he would have been immune to all the effects of the five senses. Śāriputra admired the cleverness of the goddess, and asked her why she should appear in a female bodily form, in spite of being so knowledgeable. The goddess thereupon proved that all phenomena, including forms, are unreal by changing Śāriputra into her own female form, while herself changing into the form of Śāriputra.

The pedestals supported by lions, approaching from the upper right corner in the Murtuq mural represent flying lion-thrones procured by Vimalakīrti from a distant Buddha land.

“...the room was broad and spacious enough to hold all these thirty-two thousand lion seats without the slightest crowding or hindrance... Shariputra said, “Laymen, I have never seen such a thing! A little room like this and still it can hold seats as tall and broad as these! And



FIGURE 10.

the city of Vaishali is in no way crowded or obstructed, nor are any of the towns or villages of Jampudvipa or of the other of the four continents cramped or inconvenienced...!" (WATSON 1997, 77–78).

Vimalakīrti takes the opportunity to explain that the Buddhas and the bodhisattvas “can take something as tall and broad as Mount Sumeru and put it inside a mustard seed without enlarging one or shrinking the other” (WATSON 1997, 78).

The group in the middle of the top part of the Murtuq mural is also remarkable: this section in Dunhuang wall paintings usually represents the 500 elders being presented with canopies, as in Cave 138 [Figure 8], but in Murtuq the

small figures symbolise the Abhirati Universe, represented by a Buddha assembly. The Abhirati Universe is shown in a similar way on Stein painting 57 and in Cave 159.¹² Stein painting 57 on silk is interesting, as it proves that portable compositions of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* were also in circulation.

Cave 159 and Stein painting 57 have been dated to the period of the Tibetan occupation on the basis that in place of the figure of the Chinese emperor, who usually appears in front of Mañjuśrī as part of the listening crowds, a Tibetan *btsan-po* is shown with his retinue. In contrast, in the case of the Murtuq wall painting the figure of the Chinese emperor is visible in the usual position, easily recognisable by his flat crown, of the type already seen in Dunhuang Cave 220 [Figure 5]. For this reason it is likely that the wall painting was copied from an example later than the mid-ninth century. It is also significant that no Uyghur ruler's headdress is shown, which is further proof that a Chinese example from Dunhuang was followed most closely.

On the margins of the east wall a series of smaller frames is depicted. These are in bad condition, preventing the identification of their subject matter, but presumably they illustrated scenes from the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra*. Each scene is contained in a red field and is accompanied by long inscriptions in Uyghur. This arrangement recalls the Paradise paintings from Dunhuang, where stories from the relevant sutras were illustrated on either side of

¹² For Stein painting 57 see WHITFIELD 1982, 316–318 and plate 20. For Cave 159 see LI 1998, 71 and DUNHUANG 1987, plate 88.

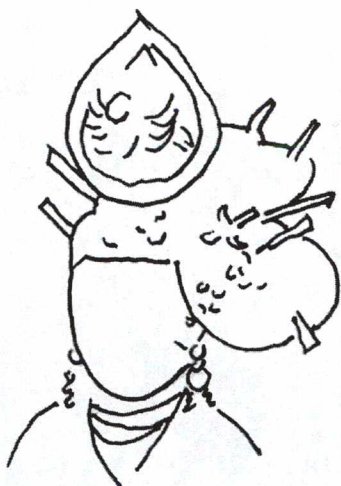


FIGURE 11.

the main composition.¹³ However, the execution is very different. In Dunhuang there are no examples where a red background colour was used, and the inscriptions were usually much shorter and simply contained in cartouches.

These differences indicate that although a Chinese example was closely followed, the artists working in Murtuq were not themselves Chinese, and they adapted the model according to the taste of their patrons. Uygur patrons were very conscious of the importance of various modes of representations, and although adopted many features from Chinese art, also emphasised their difference from the neighbours, who often regarded them as brute barbarians.¹⁴

The illustration of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*

Sūtra with the inclusion of a Chinese emperor among the crowds may be another sign of this selective approach of the Uygur patrons.

Workshop practices

The main question that must be addressed is the following: in what way could the composition so popular in Dunhuang have been passed on to the artists active in Murtuq? Recent research has brought us closer to the understanding of workshop practices in Dunhuang, and it has been argued that sketches were used for laying out the composition of wall paintings (FRASER 2004, 48–108). Sarah Fraser has also extended her research to the Turfan area, however she restricted her observations almost exclusively to the pre-Uygur Chinese period of the Xizhou prefecture (FRASER 1999, 375–418).

There is further indirect evidence for the existence of sketches in Dunhuang and in China. In Dunhuang Cave 103, from the early eighth century, Vimalakīrti is leaning forward against an arm rest, with his mouth half open as if debating the meaning of non-duality [Figure 1].

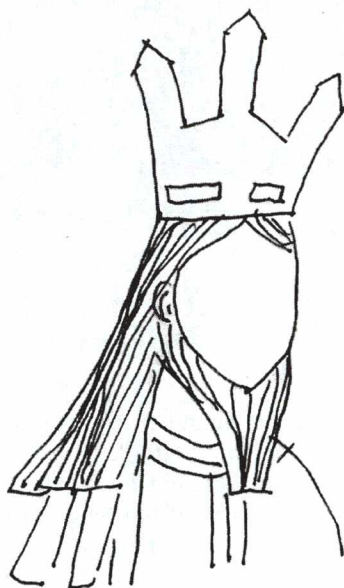


FIGURE 12.

¹³ "Paradise of Amitabha" (EO 1128 reproduced in GIÈS 1995, plate 16–1).

¹⁴ I discussed this in RUSSELL-SMITH 2001, 44–50 and RUSSELL-SMITH 2005.



FIGURE 13.

The same figural type was already in use in Dunhuang one hundred years earlier in Cave 220, dated to 642. Cave 220 is well known for its close connection to Central China and reference has already been made to the remarkable similarity of the figure of the Chinese emperor in front of Mañjuśrī to the figures of the emperors on the famous scroll at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts attributed to Yan Liben [Figures 5–6]. It is likely, therefore, that sketches were used to copy the figure of the Chinese emperor, as well as for the figure of Vimalakīrti himself.

The Tang model for representing Vimalakīrti was handed down to the Song painters, as he appears almost unchanged five hundred years later as the main figure of a painting traditionally attributed to Li Gonglin (c. 1041–

1106) [Figure 14].¹⁵ In this painting Vimalakīrti is dressed like a Chinese scholar, sitting on a high pedestal, with a female attendant holding flowers behind him. Only in the knowledge of the earlier extended Vimalakīrti illustrations can we identify the female attendant as the goddess, and the tiny figures of lions decorating Vimalakīrti's seat as references to the lion thrones.

The artist must have followed Tang models, possibly using pattern books or stencils, for this painting. Even though none of these has survived in central China itself, the extreme closeness to the composition in Dunhuang makes this very likely. The Song Vimalakīrti is almost identical to the type shown in Cave 103, the only major difference being that it is a mirror image

– further strengthening the impression that this may be the result of repeated copying. Of course this facial type for depicting scholars was already known in earlier Chinese art, but the similarities between the other details are so close that an indirect connection between these two compositions is certain.¹⁶

If a mode of representation could be followed so closely five hundred years later, it is very likely that similar sketches were in circulation in contemporary Xizhou and Shazhou, especially in the light of the close connection between these two regions.¹⁷ Fraser's research on workshop practices has made it clear that workshops were highly organised in the Dunhuang area by the tenth



FIGURE 14.

¹⁵ H: 91.5 cm W: 61.3 cm (AK 397, National Museum, Kyoto). For a reproduction see the museum's website (http://www.kyohaku.go.jp/eng/index_top.html) or SIRÉN 1956, plate 199.

¹⁶ Even though these paintings of Vimalakīrti are very well known this had not been pointed out before, to my knowledge. I first drew attention to this in 1991, when writing an essay on Vimalakīrti illustrations in Dunhuang and also in RUSSELL-SMITH 2001, 114–116.

¹⁷ There was a regular exchange of envoys, and visits by Buddhist monks, Shazhou monasteries also sent Buddhist scriptures to Xizhou (RUSSELL-SMITH 2001, 79–81; RUSSELL-SMITH 2003, 408).

century, and that sketchbooks and stencils were widely used. Importantly, also according to Fraser, the oldest sketch still in existence comes from the Turfan area, and can be dated to the Jushi 車師 period in the fifth century (FRASER 1999, 377). The Vimalakīrti illustration in Murtuq reveals a close connection between Dunhuang and Turfan. Further evidence for these links is presented by a sketch similar in several details to the Murtuq wall painting from Dunhuang that survives in the British Museum in London (Stein painting 76) [Figures 15].¹⁸



FIGURE 15.

This sketch of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* illustration may have been used as a model for wall paintings in Dunhuang in the early tenth century (FRASER 1996, 170–173). It could also be a practice drawing, reflecting popular compositions of the time. The sketch shows only parts of the composition, with Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī appearing on different parts of the paper, therefore only limited comparisons can be made. It is clear that the general arrangement is similar, and the composition represents the same type that was used in Murtuq.¹⁹ Stein painting 76 is an important proof of the existence of portable sketches of this subject matter. The sketch can be dated to 914 by a draft of a letter written on a sheet between the split drawings of Mañjuśrī

¹⁸ Stein painting 76. Ink on paper, H: 31 cm W: 127 cm; WHITFIELD 1983, fig. 86.

¹⁹ Differences lie in minor stylistic details, such as in the treatment of Mañjuśrī's throne, which is decorated with a scroll pattern in the case of the Uyghur mural.

and Vimalakīrti.²⁰ Fraser links the sketch with Cave 146, which is dated to the early tenth century.

The Murtuq *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* composition is closest to Late Tang examples in its arrangement. On later Dunhuang examples, such as that on the two sides of the entrance in Cave 98, which dates from the first half of the tenth century, the composition is far more crowded with additional figures and scenes, and Vimalakīrti's and Mañjuśrī's figures are reduced in size and importance [Figure 9]. As the arrangement is simpler and more clearly laid out in Murtuq, it is likely that an earlier model was followed. There are similarities between the Murtuq mural and the composition of a wall painting in Cave 138 with regard to the layout of the composition and the iconography [Figure 7, 7a]. Cave 138 has been dated to 894–906. Additionally, there are similarities with the Vimalakīrti sketch from the British Museum, which is likely to date from the early tenth century.

On account of the observed similarities, it is possible that the Murtuq *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* mural was completed in the tenth century, although at present our understanding of the relationship between the various Uygur wall-painting styles is insufficient to make a final conclusion possible. In view of the afore mentioned example of how a Tang model could still be used in Song times it is also possible that an 'old-fashioned', traditional model was used in Murtuq in the eleventh century. We know from the study of surviving Uygur wall paintings that in the Turfan area walls were never so densely decorated as in tenth-century Dunhuang. It is hoped that in the future the Murtuq wall painting's links to Bezeklik will be investigated in detail.

The Murtuq mural can be identified as an important Uygur representation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra*, thereby proving that under the influence of Dunhuang proto-types – possibly through the use of sketches – this subject matter was also illustrated in Central Asia, enabling the Uygur patrons to select a Chinese iconographic type and adapt it to their own taste.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Vimalakīrti from Dunhuang Cave 103, east wall southern side [wall painting] (after DUNHUANG 1987, plate 155).
2. Binglingsi Cave 169, north wall, no. 10 (after CHUGOKU 1986, plate 41).
3. Longmen Guyang Cave, north wall, II level no. 3 (after CHUGOKU 1986, plate 166).
4. Dunhuang Cave 380 (after DUNHUANG 1984, plate 189).
5. Dunhuang Cave 220, eastern wall, the figure of the Chinese Emperor from an illustration of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* (after DUNHUANG 1987, 175, fig. 22).
6. Attributed to Yan Liben (died 673): detail of "Thirteen Emperors", Museum of Fine Arts, Boston [Denman Waldo Ross Collection 31.643] (after DUNHUANG 1987, 175, fig. 23).
7. Illustration of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* from Dunhuang Cave 138, southern side of east wall [wall painting] (after DUNHUANG 1987a, plate 193) [Left].

²⁰ For a description of the letter see WHITFIELD–FARRER 1990, 92, cat. no. 72. The text was dated by Rong Xinjiang (FRASER 1996, 173).

- 7a. Illustration of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* from Dunhuang Cave 138, southern side of east wall [wall painting] (after DUNHUANG 1987a, plate 193) [Right].
8. Detail [of no. 7]. Uyghur envoy identified by his headgear.
9. Illustration of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* from Dunhuang Cave 98, northern side of east wall [wall painting] (after DUNHUANG 1987b, plate 10).
10. Ganzhou Uyghur donors from Dunhuang Cave 98 [wall painting] (after DUNHUANG 1987b, plate 12).
11. Uyghur female headdress (after GABAIN 1973, fig. 106).
12. Uyghur three-pronged headdress (*Dreizackkappe*) (after GABAIN 1973, fig. 95).
13. Illustration of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* from Murtuq Cave 3, east wall [wall painting] (after ZHONGGUO 1995, plate 169).
14. Li Gonglin (attr.): "*Vimalakīrti*" [AK 379. Ink on silk, H: 91.5 cm W: 51.3 cm] (© National Museum, Kyoto).
15. Sketch of an illustration of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* [Stein painting 76. Ink on paper, H: 31 cm W: 127 cm (full composition)] (© Trustees of the British Museum, London).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- CHEN 1964 = Chen, K. S.: *Buddhism in China*. Princeton 1964.
- CHUGOKU 1986 = *Chugoku sekkutsu: Heireiji sekkutsu*. Tokyo–Beijing 1986.
- DUNHUANG 1984 = *Zhongguo shiku – Dunhuang Mogaoku* [Chinese cave temples – Dunhuang Mogao caves]. Vol. 2. Ed.: Dunhuang Wenwu yanjiusuo [Dunhuang Research Institute]. Beijing 1984.
- DUNHUANG 1987 = *Zhongguo shiku – Dunhuang Mogaoku* [Chinese cave temples – Dunhuang Mogao caves]. Vol. 3. Ed.: Dunhuang Wenwu yanjiusuo [Dunhuang Research Institute]. Beijing 1987.
- DUNHUANG 1987a = *Zhongguo shiku – Dunhuang Mogaoku* [Chinese cave temples – Dunhuang Mogao caves]. Vol. 4. Ed.: Dunhuang Wenwu yanjiusuo [Dunhuang Research Institute]. Beijing 1987.
- DUNHUANG 1987b = *Zhongguo shiku – Dunhuang Mogaoku* [Chinese cave temples – Dunhuang Mogao caves]. Vol. 5. Ed.: Dunhuang Wenwu yanjiusuo [Dunhuang Research Institute]. Beijing 1987.
- EBERT 2000 = Ebert, J.: Ein Vimalakīrti-Bildfragment aus Turfan. In: ZIEME 2000, 197–202.
- FRASER 1996 = Fraser, S. E.: *The Artist's Practice in Tang China, 8–10th centuries*. [Ann Arbor: UMI, PhD dissertation.] Berkeley 1996.
- FRASER 1999 = Fraser, S. E.: A Reconsideration of the Archaeological Finds from the Turfan Region. *Dunhuang Tulufan Yanjiu* [Dunhuang Turfan Research] 4 (1999), 375–418.
- FRASER 2004 = Fraser, S. E.: *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618–960*. Stanford 2004.
- GABAIN 1973 = Gabain, A. von: *Das Leben im uigurischen Königreich von Qoco (850–1250)*. Wiesbaden 1973.
- GABAIN 1965 = Gabain, A. von: Die Dreizack-Kappe uigurischer Würdenträger. *Ural-Altaische Jahrbücher* 36 (1965), 331–335.
- GIÈS 1995 = *Les arts de l'Asie centrale. La collection Paul Pelliot du musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet*. Vol. 1–2. Ed.: J. Giès. Paris 1995.
- GRÜNWEDEL 1912 = Grünwedel, A.: *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten in Chinesisch Turkistan*. Berlin 1912.

- HE 1983 = He, S.: Dunhuang Mogaoku bihuazhongde 'Weimojie jingbian'. *Dunhuang yanjiu* 1983.
- HO 1985 = Ho, J. C.: *Tunhuang Cave: 249: A Representation of the Vimalakīrtinird-eśa*. [PhD Thesis.] Yale University 1985.
- KHUDYAKOV 1985 = Khudyakov, Yu. S.: Drevnetiurkskie pominal'nie pamiatniki na territorii Mongolii. In: *Drevnie kul'tury Mongolii*. Red.: R. S. Vasil'evskii. Novosibirsk 1985, 168–184.
- KUNKOVÁCS 2002 = Kunkovacs L.: *Kőemberek. A sztyeppe népek ősi hagyatéka* [Stone men. The ancient heritage of the people of the steppes.] Budapest 2002.
- LAING 1974 = Laing, E. J.: Neo Taoism and the 'Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove' in Chinese Painting. *Artibus Asiae* 36 (1974), 5–54.
- LAMOTTE 1976 = Lamotte, É.: *The teaching of Vimalakīrti: (Vimalakīrtinird-eśa): from the French translation with introduction and notes*. London 1976.
- LAWTON 1973 = Lawton, T.: *Chinese Figure Painting*. Washington D. C. 1973.
- LE COQ 1913 = Le Coq, A. von: *Chotscho. Facsimile-Wiedergabe der Wichtigeren Funde der ersten Königlich Preussischen Turfan-Expedition nach Turfan in Ost-Turkistan*. Berlin 1913.
- LI 1998 = *Dunhuangxue Dacidian* [Great dictionary of Dunhuang Studies]. Ed.: Li X. Shanghai 1998.
- NING 2004 = Ning, Q.: *Art, Religion, and Politics in Medieval China*. Honolulu 2004.
- RUSSELL-SMITH 2001 = Russell-Smith, L.: *Uygur Patronage in Dunhuang in the Tenth-Eleventh Centuries*. [PhD dissertation, SOAS, University of London.] 2001.
- RUSSELL-SMITH 2003 = *Bikfalvy Russell-Smith, L.: Wives and Patrons: Uygur political and artistic influence in tenth-century Dunhuang*. *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 56 (2003), 401–428.
- RUSSELL-SMITH 2005 = Russell-Smith, L.: *Uygur Patronage in Dunhuang: Regional Art Centres on the Northern Silk Road in the Tenth Century*. Leiden 2005 [in press].
- SIRÉN 1956 = Sirén, O.: *Chinese Painting. Leading Masters and Principles*. Vol. 3. London 1956.
- WATSON 1997 = Watson, B.: *The Vimalakīrti Sutra*. New York 1997.
- WHITFIELD-FARRER 1990 = Whitfield, R.–Farrer, A.: *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas. Chinese Art from the Silk Route*. London 1990.
- WHITFIELD 1982 = Whitfield, R.: *The Art of Central Asia. The Stein Collection in the British Museum*. Vol. 1. Tokyo 1982.
- WHITFIELD 1983 = Whitfield, R.: *The Art of Central Asia. The Stein Collection in the British Museum*. Vol. 2. Tokyo 1983.
- WU 1996 = Wu, T.: *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: Tang through Yuan Dynasties*. Boston–Tokyo 1996.
- YALDIZ 2000 = Yaldiz, M.–Gadebusch, R. D. et al: *Magische Götterwelten. Werke aus dem Museum für Indische Kunst Berlin*. Berlin 2000.
- ZHONGGUO 1995 = *Zhongguo Xinjiang bihua quanji* [Collection of wall paintings from Xinjiang, China]. Ed.: Zhongguo bihua quanji bianji weiyuanhui [Complete edition of Chinese painting editorial board]. Vol. 6. *Baizikelike, Tuyougou* [Bezeklik, Toyok]. Shenyang 1995.
- ZIEME 2000 = Zieme, P.: *Vimalakīrtinird-eśa Sūtra. Edition alttürkischer Übersetzungen nach Handschriftfragmenten von Berlin und Kyoto*. Turnhout 2000.